

## **MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

For Immediate Release

January 30, 2014

### **Commerce Commissioner announces \$15,814,434 in additional LIHEAP funds to help Minnesota consumers stay warm this winter**

SAINT PAUL, MN – The Minnesota Department of Commerce announced today that Minnesota will receive an additional \$15,814,434 in federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds for the Energy Assistance Program (EAP). The total amount of funds Minnesota has received this year is \$114,540,746. The LIHEAP program in Minnesota helps low-income homeowners and renters pay heating bills through grant money paid directly to utility companies and heating fuel vendors on behalf of customers.

This announcement is critical for Minnesota's low-income households, especially those with seniors, young children, veterans, and people with disabilities. The ongoing sub-zero, arctic weather and sky-rocketing propane prices have added additional stress to family budgets. To address this need, the Department of Commerce recently increased crisis benefits from \$500 to \$1,000 for households that heat with propane or heating oil. The additional LIHEAP funds announced today is greatly needed and with projected sub-zero temperatures continuing in the next few weeks, the State of Minnesota is calling on Congress to provide additional funding.

"These critical federal dollars will make a difference to help Minnesotans who struggle to pay for home heating and make ends meet in the cold winter months ahead. The Minnesota Commerce Department has and will work hard to make sure these funds best help low-income families and individuals in need of energy assistance," said Commissioner Mike Rothman. "No Minnesotan should be without a warm place to call home during this bitterly cold winter."

The Minnesota Department of Commerce administers the LIHEAP in partnership with 32 local service providers throughout the state. LIHEAP is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program helps renters and homeowners earning less than 50 percent of the state's median income (\$42,789 for a family of four) obtain grant money to help pay their heating bills. Last year, Minnesota served 147,636 households and renters with \$109 million in federal funds.

**How to apply:**

Qualifying families must apply for assistance at the local service provider in their area. Funding is limited and is administered on a first-come, first-served basis. Interested households should contact their local service provider by calling [1-800-657-3710](tel:1-800-657-3710) or visiting the [Energy Assistance](https://mn.gov/commerce/energy) section of the Commerce Department's website ([mn.gov/commerce/energy](https://mn.gov/commerce/energy)). The Minnesota EAP is supported by federal LIHEAP funding and administered by the Minnesota Department of Commerce.

### **State Emergency Operations Center:**

Governor Mark Dayton declared a State of Peacetime Emergency in Minnesota in response to the persistent cold weather and the increased risk households may run out of heating fuel, a situation that would pose immediate threat to public safety. This declaration activated the state's emergency operations center housing a hotline for Minnesota residents with questions about the current propane situation or who are in danger of running out of heating fuel. Minnesotans can call [651-297-1304](tel:651-297-1304) in the metro area or [1-800-657-3504](tel:1-800-657-3504) in greater Minnesota.

### **What consumers and Minnesota residents can do to stay safe:**

People who use propane to heat their homes can take several steps at this time.

- Conserve energy as much as possible. Turn down thermostats and be aware of your propane use.
- Check in on your family members, neighbors and friends. Call 9-1-1 only in a crisis
- State Hotline and Department of Commerce online resources are available
  - [1-800-657-3504](tel:1-800-657-3504) in greater Minnesota
  - [651-297-1304](tel:651-297-1304) in the metro area
  - Department of Commerce [Energy Assistance Program Section](https://mn.gov/commerce/energy)

### **Use Alternative Heat Sources Safely:**

People often turn to alternative heat sources to stay warm when the temperature plummets. The State Fire Marshal (SFM) reminds residents to use caution when using alternative heating sources.

Types of alternative heating sources often seen include:

- Portable electric heaters
- Liquid-fueled heaters:
  - Kerosene
  - Waste oil
- Gas-burning heaters – Propane is most common
- Solid-fuel heating:
  - Wood-burning
  - Pellet-burning

Any heating appliance with an open flame needs to be vented to the outside because the combustion process of burning fuel uses oxygen and also gives off carbon monoxide — a deadly combination inside of a home.

**Other tips when using alternative heat sources:**

- Keep anything flammable -- including pets and people -- at least three feet away from heating equipment.
- Make sure portable space heaters have an automatic shut-off.
- Turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.
- Space heaters need constant watching. Never leave a space heater on when you go to sleep. Never place a space heater close to any sleeping person.
- Make sure all cords on electric heaters are in good shape and checked periodically for any frays or breaks in the insulation surrounding the wires.
- Check the cord and outlet occasionally for overheating; if it feels hot, discontinue use.
- Place the heater on a level, hard and nonflammable surface, not on rugs or carpets or near bedding or drapes.

- Use a heater that has been tested to the latest safety standards and certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory. These heaters will have the most up to date safety features; older space heaters may not meet the newer safety standards.

## **Stay Warm Minnesota**

Other forms of assistance may be available through county social service programs, community-based organizations, and nonprofit agencies. See the [Stay Warm Minnesota Webpage](#) for a list of resources.